

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**AFGHANISTAN AND OPIUM: BREAKING THE HABIT**

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## ABSTRACT

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Afghanistan has the dubious distinction of being the largest opium-producing country in the world. Seventy-five percent of the world's heroin, which is obtained from opium poppies, comes from Afghanistan. Opium exports brought Afghanistan \$1.2 billion last year, equaling the total of international aid to the country for the same period. Although the Afghan government and Islamic religion disapprove of growing poppies, other major influences—economic, social, and political—promote poppy farming. The United States government has an interest in controlling the influx of heroin into this country as well as an interest in a strong, stable Afghan government and a stable south Asia region. This paper will describe the background leading to Afghanistan's position as the world's leader in opium production, explore possible United States responses to this troubling situation and recommend a course of action.



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## AFGHANISTAN AND OPIUM: BREAKING THE HABIT

Cooperation in rebuilding Afghanistan, in bringing stability and a measure of improvement for the people of that devastated land, lies in thinking big on a small stage. Recovery (of Afghanistan) lies in helping the provinces, province by province.<sup>1</sup>

—Alvin Z. Rubinstein

Afghanistan has the dubious distinction of being the largest opium-producing country in the world. According to a report in the *Los Angeles Times*, “It regained its position last year with a yield of 3,750 metric tons, and production is expected to be as high this year, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reports. Seventy-five percent of the world’s heroin, which is obtained from opium poppies, comes from Afghanistan. Bernard Farhi, chief of the operations branch of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, reported to a congressional hearing in June that opium brought Afghanistan \$1.2 billion last year, equaling the total of international aid to the country for the same period. In a recent report, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said opium accounted for as much as half of Afghanistan’s gross domestic product, amounting to \$2.5 billion in exports.”<sup>2</sup>

Although the Afghan government and Islamic religion disapprove of growing poppies, other major influences—economic, social, and political—promote poppy farming. The United States government has an interest in controlling the influx of heroin into this country as well as an interest in a strong, stable Afghan government and a stable south Asia region.

So why did Afghanistan resume its opium production? How much pressure should the United States government exert on the Government of Afghanistan to curtail this production? If the United States chooses to assist Afghanistan, in what form should the assistance come? This paper will describe the background leading to Afghanistan’s position as the world’s leader in opium production, explore possible United States responses to this troubling situation and recommend a course of action.

### BACKGROUND

Afghanistan’s economy is largely agrarian. Richard Nyrop and Donald Seekins describe Afghanistan’s culture, history, and economy in the U.S. Army-sponsored Foreign Area Studies handbook, *Afghanistan: A Country Study*. They report that “Agriculture dominated the economy throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The share of agricultural output in GDP remained about 60 percent between 1961 and 1980. These figures are probably too low, for a great deal of agricultural output remained on farms as subsistence production.”<sup>3</sup>



“Agriculture was the foundation of the of the economy not only because of its large contribution to GDP and national employment but also because it provided many of the materials upon which much of the country’s industry and trade depended. Cotton was the critical raw material for the textile industries and a valuable export; wool was the main input for the important carpet industry and was also an important export commodity. Cottonseed was the key input for the extraction, refining, and soap industries. The sugar beet crop was refined domestically, and there was also fruit and nut processing and packaging for export. Hides and skins were key inputs for much of the local handicrafts industry and were also major export items. Agricultural products constituted 75 percent of the country’s exports in 1977, but this fell to 43 percent in 1984 as natural gas exports increased.”<sup>4</sup>

Afghanistan is approximately the size of Texas and host to a population of 28 million people, the majority of whom are illiterate. Only one-eighth of Afghanistan (about 8 million hectares, a little more than 30,000 square miles) is considered arable land. “This arable land was scattered throughout the country, primarily in valleys along rivers and other water sources. The total irrigable area was about 5.3 million hectares, of which half irrigated annually while the other half remained fallow. Before 1978, when the Soviet-backed People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) came to power, the irrigated land area provided Afghanistan with 85 percent of all food industrial crops produced. Another 1.4 million hectares of cultivated rain-fed land supplemented the irrigated areas.”<sup>5</sup>

Poor farming techniques kept Afghanistan’s agricultural yields low. “The soil itself lacked basic nutrients and key trace elements, having been developed under arid conditions. The soil’s natural deficiencies were exacerbated by traditional farming practices and the cultivation of soil-depleting crops, such as wheat, barley, rice, and corn. Little of the land was fertilized because animal manure was used for fuel. There was little crop rotation. In addition, farmers used old seed strains and had only limited access to chemical fertilizers and pesticides. By the mid-1970s, however, the country’s agricultural sector was making modest achievements. Fertilizer use increased from 9,000 tons in 1967 to over 100,000 tons in 1978. In the 1960s the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) began a program that was designed to raise wheat output through higher yielding varieties so that wheat output would rise enough to achieve basic self-sufficiency. New varieties of rice, sugarcane, sugar beets, and cotton were also introduced into the country. Average yields rose during the decade before the PDPA coup.”<sup>6</sup> The moderately successful agriculture programs showed that with outside assistance, Afghanistan could develop along modern expectations. “After the PDPA came to power, the Afghan government claimed that by 1984 farm output was near or at all-time highs

for output of cereals, vegetables, and fruits. Overall, the government boasted that the level of total agricultural output was more than 15 percent greater than the levels of the mid-1970s.”<sup>7</sup>

Between 1979 and 1988, when the Soviet Army invaded and occupied Afghanistan, “the Afghan government and the Soviets pursued a ‘scorched earth’ strategy in an effort to curb armed resistance activities in the countryside. This activity seriously disrupted the rural economy in many regions. In the wake of government attacks and mass reprisals, entire regions that were once fertile became areas of barren waste. Various tactics were employed to spread terror and to destroy both food sources and means of food production. Even more serious for the longer term prospects were the attacks against the agricultural infrastructure. In many areas the local irrigation system had less capacity as a result of bombing attacks and the reduced levels of maintenance. Dams had not been rebuilt after the spring runoffs, and water canals filled with sand and mud. In Qandahar, for instance, many of the fruit orchards were dying for lack of water. These orchards would take years to replace.”<sup>8</sup>

The fighting also had an impact on the farmers. “Harsh assaults on villages suspected of harboring guerrillas had depopulated large portions of the Afghan countryside. Entire families fled to escape the fighting. Others fled to escape the government’s forced enlistment of men for the army. Large numbers of the male farm labor force were fighting with the resistance. This depopulation of the countryside reduced Afghanistan’s agricultural capacity.”<sup>9</sup>

Martin Ewans offers an updated account of Afghanistan through the rise and fall of Taliban control in *Afghanistan: A Short History of Its People and Politics*. “After nearly twenty years of communist revolution, Soviet occupation and civil war, Afghanistan faces severe environmental problems, among others. There is widespread soil degradation, deforestation, and desertification. Much of the country is over-grazed and the few forests that remain are being rapidly felled for fuel and construction material. Its infrastructure has been devastated and less than two-thirds of its agricultural land is cultivated.”<sup>10</sup>

A number of reports from various sources provide similar dire conditions: “5 million to 7 million land mines saturate Afghanistan’s roads and fields; there are only 10 paved airports in the country, just 24 kilometers of railways, and 2,800 kilometers of largely destroyed paved roads.”<sup>11</sup>

This is the backdrop against which Afghanistan’s national economic condition and any potential policy solutions must be considered.

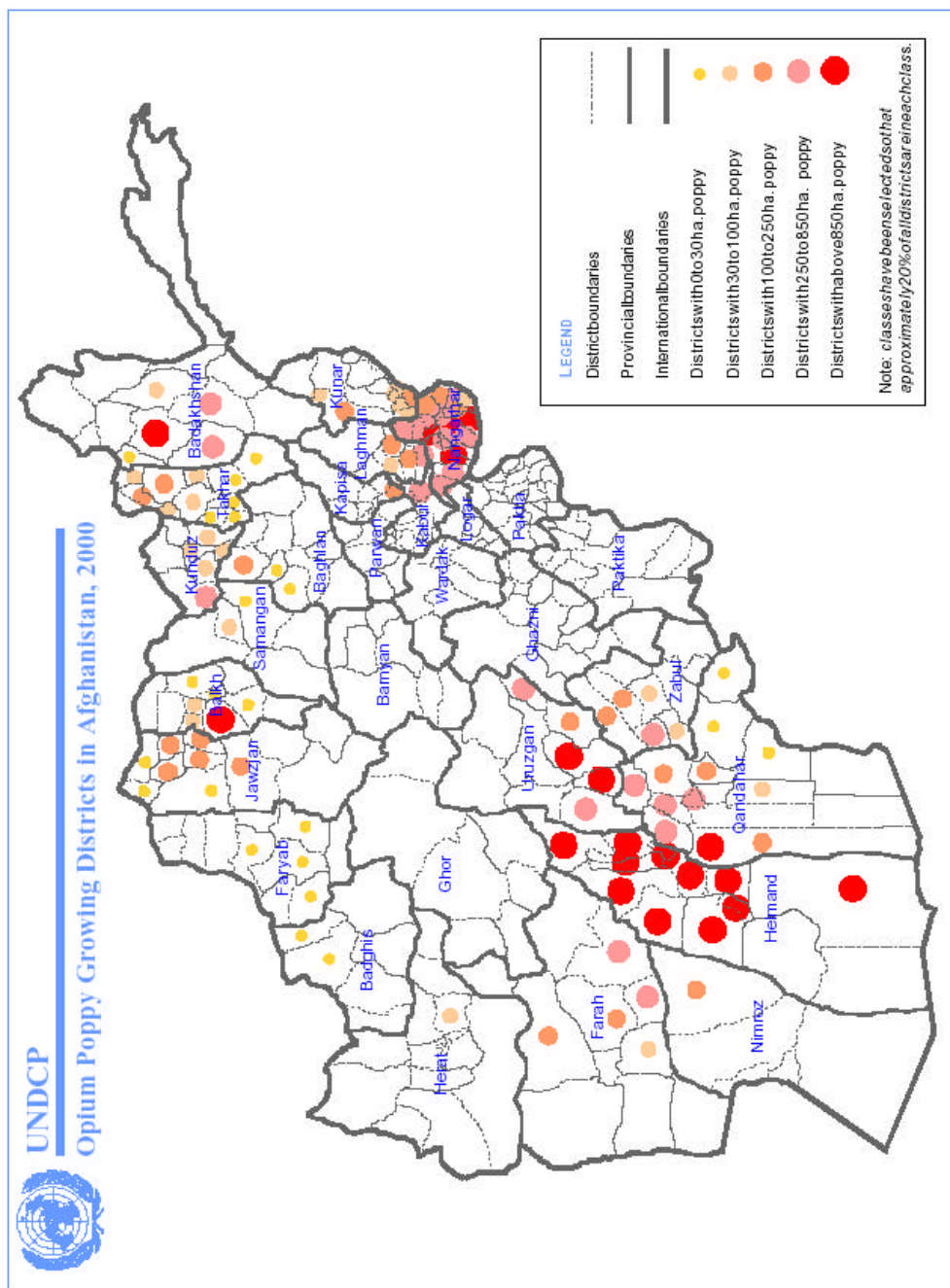


FIGURE 1. OPIUM POPPY GROWING DISTRICTS IN AFGHANISTAN

## THE PROBLEMS

The growing drug industry in Afghanistan—growing poppies and harvesting the sap, processing the sap into opium paste, morphine and heroin, and transporting the drugs through the country and across its borders—presents numerous challenges for the central Afghan government and Afghan citizens. “Opium cultivation has spread to 28 of the country’s 32 provinces, up from 24 in 2002 and 18 in 1999.”<sup>12</sup> How well the Afghan government handles these difficulties has strong implications for the future of Afghanistan.

There are economic problems, such as allocation of precious land and labor needed for legitimate agriculture. The largest economic challenge is the diversion of profits from the drug trade that, if it was a legitimate enterprise, would ordinarily circulate throughout the national economic system to benefit all Afghans through economic development, but now benefits only a relatively small and powerful portion of the population.

Social problems, both short term and long term, challenge the government and international groups assisting Afghanistan. Local authorities become corrupted by the drug trade, either by direct participation or by accepting bribes to ignore the trade. No drug is completely exported from its source. The incidence of drug use, and the attendant rise in HIV and AIDS cases, will increase in areas near the processing laboratories and along the trade routes. Also, there is the criminal element of the drug trade. According to General McCaffrey, “This criminal element is highly organized with stable prices, advance credit for fertilizer, an effective money-laundering system and secure transportation to protect shipments.”<sup>13</sup>

Afghanistan presents a complex political challenge.<sup>14</sup> The population is a collection of various tribes with a long history of conflict and not a strong sense of “nationhood” among them. The interim Afghan government has struggled against this tribalism in its efforts to establish its authority and move Afghanistan forward as a nation.

Perhaps the greatest problem posed by Afghanistan’s opium industry is the link between terrorism and drug money. The administrator of the Drug Enforcement Agency, Asa Hutchinson, in his testimony before Congress in April 1992, stated “The DEA has also received multi-source information that Osama bin Laden himself has been involved in the financing and facilitation of heroin-trafficking activities.”<sup>15</sup>

## ECONOMIC

Opium production is a growing business in Afghanistan for many reasons. Farmers can earn more money growing opium poppies than by raising legitimate crops and with less effort. According to United Nations estimates, Afghan farmers can earn about \$5,200 from an acre of

opium, compared to \$121 from an acre of wheat.<sup>16</sup> *The Washington Post* reports that “Endless fighting destroyed Afghanistan’s agricultural infrastructure, in particular the irrigation canals and roads. Poor farmers increasingly turned to opium to support their families. The opium poppy requires less water than wheat, and the valuable sap it produces could be sold quickly to dealers in the fields or kept indefinitely on a shelf and used as barter whenever a family needed something from the local bazaar.”<sup>17</sup> Wheat, on the other hand, must be harvested quickly after maturing, moved to the marketplace, and processed or consumed in a relatively short time before the grain spoils. Given Afghanistan’s nearly non-existent food processing industry, much of the grain must be milled and consumed locally.

Tribal warlords use the proceeds from poppy production within their area of control to bribe local and provincial officials and to maintain their power base through weapons acquisitions. Similarly, remnants of the Taliban are using their drug profits to acquire weapons and attempt to reestablish power in the southern regions of Afghanistan. They are also reportedly using opium as a means to retaliate against the United States.

The drug industry also reallocates labor from necessary and legitimate work, such as repairing Afghanistan’s agricultural and transportation infrastructure. Many workers leave their relatively low-paying reconstruction jobs, lured by the better pay from opium production, drug processing and transportation. The higher wages the drug industry offers drives up the cost of labor throughout the market, increasing government and aid agency costs. Eliminating the drug industry will increase the labor pool and return labor costs to a more sustainable level.

Unfortunately, the profits generated by harvesting the raw opium from poppies, manufacturing the opium into heroin, and smuggling the drug to market bypass the national treasury and do not help Afghanistan as a whole. According to IMF reports, “opium production and trafficking accounted for as much as half of Afghanistan’s gross domestic product, amounting to \$2.5 billion in exports.”<sup>18</sup> This amount exceeds the Afghan central government’s budget and international reconstruction funds. National rebuilding efforts, including infrastructure and social programs, continue to rely on donations from other nations. The drug trade creates a destabilizing force, undermining the interim government’s authority in the regions beyond Kabul.

## SOCIAL

According to *The Washington Post*, “Drug laboratories where raw opium is processed into morphine or heroin—once rare in Afghanistan—are sprouting at an unprecedented rate. Many authorities appear less inclined to combat new drug syndicates than to share in their profits.

The crude but money-making factories are largely condoned by elders, unmolested by police and guarded by militiamen and their commanders.”<sup>19</sup>

*The Christian Science Monitor* reported,<sup>20</sup> “Poppy cultivation could not happen without the knowledge of the powerful warlords who still control most of Afghanistan with their loyal militias. Sources say warlords, commanders, and corrupt officials buy opium from the farmers and provide safe passage to drug barons, who smuggle out either raw opium or refined heroin processed in makeshift factories.” The report continues, “As more poppy cash is believed to be flowing into the coffers of Afghan warlords, American money may buy less influence with the warlords and jeopardize joint operations hunting down Taliban and al-Qaeda remnants.”

According to *Newsweek*, “Increasingly powerful warlords—most of them US allies—have begun nurturing poppy cultivation and elbowing their way into the illegal trade, despite President Karzai’s prohibitions against it. Their defiance is further weakening the central government’s authority in the provinces as more Afghans cash in on the drug bonanza. There is new evidence that smugglers and Taliban remnants may be teaming up to challenge Karzai’s authority. In fact, the network of warlords and corrupt officials who operate this illegal traffic may pose the most potent threat to the country’s stability.”<sup>21</sup> “The Afghan government is trying to improve its drug enforcement policy but without a national police force or army, President Karzai’s interim government cannot enforce its poppy ban, leaving drug-eradication workers exposed to retaliation.”<sup>22</sup> “The growing drug trade and the corruption it is spawning threaten to make moot the ongoing debates over such basic issues as law and governance. Left unchecked, worried critics say, this will turn Afghanistan into a narco-mafia state.”<sup>23</sup>

## POLITICAL

One can argue whether Afghanistan meets the criteria as an independent state—defined borders, a central government and infrastructure, a common language and culture—and conclude that it is not a state. It is the last point, common language and culture, which especially cause problems for Afghanistan’s future. The Afghan people are descended from nomadic tribes who relied on trade for their survival. Today many ethnicities—including Tajik, Uzbek, Hazara, and Pashtun, and many others—reside within Afghanistan’s borders, which themselves are perhaps nothing more than the result of the borders established by the neighboring British, Persian and Russian empires. Ethnic Tajiks and Uzbeks are the predominant residents in the northern one-third of Afghanistan. Ethnic Pashtuns are the majority of the population in the southeast of the country. Periodic tribal conflict, not peaceful coexistence, has been the norm throughout Afghanistan’s history. There are encouraging

movements within Afghanistan, however. The *Loya Jirga*, a collection of tribal representatives from around the country, met last October to ratify the country's new constitution. The constitution outlines the process for electing the President, the Vice President, and the Parliament. National elections are scheduled to be held this June. More important than the documents, however, is how the government will implement its power.

The "warlords" are tribal and ethnic chieftains who were instrumental to the successful coalition operations against the Taliban in 2001 and 2002. However, in order to gain their support and build the alliance, military planners overlooked some details. Rensselaer Lee, an expert on the international drug trade, pointed out in testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee that control of drugs had taken a back seat to fighting terrorism in the effort to build consensus and alliances. "To build these alliances, unfortunately we've had to make some arrangements, compromises with people who frankly may have some history of involvement with the drug trade and may be even currently protecting the drug trade. This is a tragic situation because given these consensus-building imperatives of the war against terrorism, it is inconceivable that Afghanistan can ever develop as a nation without getting a handle on this opium problem."<sup>24</sup>

Special Operations forces continue to work closely with the warlords and their militias today. Maloney cautions that "the loyalties of these chieftains and the people they control and represent can shift for a variety of reasons. It is critical...to understand...the intricacies of the tribal relationships and religious affiliations of the groups [we] interact with. Failure to do so will result in failure."<sup>25</sup>

## TERRORISM LINKS

Heroin from Afghanistan provided the Taliban with \$8 billion dollars in 1999, according to Rachel Ehrenfeld, in her book, *Funding Evil; How Terrorism is Financed and How to Stop It*. She writes, "The Taliban government, together with al-Qaeda, had taxed the poppy growers and producers of opium base and heroin while al-Qaeda provided the growers with protection from warlords and other bandits who would otherwise have stolen their crop."<sup>26</sup> The rise of the Taliban to power was the beginning of Afghanistan's descent into reliance upon the drug trade to survive.

According to the IMF, cultivating opium poppies in Afghanistan boomed in the early 1980s after Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran banned its production, thus raising street prices.<sup>27</sup> The *New York Times* reports, "From 1994 to 2000, Afghanistan's production of opium averaged around 3,000 metric tons a year. Output dropped to just 185 tons in 2001 after the Taliban rulers

banned production.<sup>128</sup> By contrast, less than 200 metric tons of opium was produced in 1978, before the Soviet invasion.

During the Taliban's control of Afghanistan from 1995 through 2001, the production and shipment of opium flourished. "The attitude formally adopted by the Taliban was that the production and shipment of illicit drugs throughout its territory is 'illegal and prohibited.' In 1999, Mohammed Omar, leader of the Taliban, issued an edict calling for poppy cultivation to be cut by a third, and in July 2000 he followed this up by announcing a total ban. At the same time, however, he called for international assistance and insisted that the Taliban had 'only limited means' to enforce their decision."<sup>29</sup> The Taliban took advantage of a drought in the region during 1999 to project a positive image to the world by announcing the curbs on poppy cultivation. In fact, according to Ehrenfeld, the Taliban and al-Qaeda stashed 500 metric tons of heroin in caves in the Afghan mountains. During 2000, although poppy cultivation had been banned, there was only a ten percent decrease in opium production.<sup>30</sup>

During the late 1990s, most of the opium production came from provinces under the control of the Taliban: Qandahar, Helmand, Uruzgan, Nangarhar, and Badakhshan. "Much of the raw opium was shipped to the frontier areas of Pakistan, where numerous small laboratories refined it into heroin. The processed heroin was shipped out via Karachi, Pakistan, while routes also exist through Iran to Turkey, and from northern Afghanistan through the Central Asian Republics to Russia."<sup>31</sup> Although the Taliban are no longer in control, they still exert influence in Qandahar and Helmand provinces and the trade routes still exist today. Most, nearly 90 percent, of the heroin produced from Afghan-grown poppies will find its way to European drug markets, although "more than a metric ton will end up in the United States, causing enormous levels of crime and human destruction."<sup>32</sup>

The 2002 opium crop, estimated to be 3,750 metric tons, would yield approximately 375 metric tons of heroin after refinement. "Such a quantity of heroin would generate about \$6 billion—and most of that would certainly facilitate further destabilization of the region, financing al-Qaeda and other Islamist organizations."<sup>33</sup> Ehrenfeld asserts that "Osama bin Laden managed the profits for the Taliban and arranged money-laundering operations with the Russian mafia. Bin Laden's commission of 10 to 15 percent from these money laundering operations would have provided him with an annual income of about \$1 billion. Since the Taliban are no longer in charge, and since heroin production is up, it is likely that al-Qaeda's and bin Laden's shares in the profits have only increased."<sup>34</sup>

"Drug money may be providing the funds needed to keep the Taliban insurgency alive. Sources in the Afghan government's antinarcotics department suggest that Taliban fighters in



southern Afghanistan collect money from the local drug smugglers for their attacks against US forces. Such attacks have already scared off international aid workers and hampered US-aligned forces that could otherwise interfere with drug trafficking and create viable alternatives to farmers.”<sup>35</sup>

“The Afghan government also claims that al-Qaeda operatives are helping the drug cartels to traffic heroin to the West. Farmers have been approached by Taliban clerics urging them to grow more poppy to destroy future generations in America and other Western countries,” *The Christian Science Monitor* reported. It quoted Abduhl Ghaus Rasoolzai, head of Eastern Afghanistan’s antinarcotics department: “al-Qaeda is using drugs as a weapon against America and other Western countries. The weapon of drugs does not make a noise. The victim does not bleed and leaves no trace of the killer.”<sup>36</sup>

## **POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS**

Policy makers in the United States, research analysts with non-governmental organizations, and IMF directors agree that action must be taken to curb the drug trade in Afghanistan as the world community works to resuscitate Afghanistan back to a functioning state. However, there are competing thoughts on the idea of Afghanistan as a nation, the role the Afghan National Army, how the warlords and their militias fit into the equation, and approaches to the problem of poppy growing and opium production. What should be the priorities to bring Afghanistan back from the brink of failure?

In the effort to rebuild Afghanistan’s infrastructure and institutions, the International Crisis Group (ICG) reminds policy makers that “Afghanistan has not had a strong central government for decades and one is not likely to emerge now. Efforts must be made to build up existing local political structures and support those that can act peacefully and learn to resolve disputes without resorting to weapons.”<sup>37</sup>

The ICG recognizes the challenge of transitioning Afghanistan’s regional militias into a national military, either by eliminating the militias or subordinating them to the central government. “Up to 200,000 soldiers will have to be integrated into a national military structure or demobilized. Military hierarchy will have to be based on law and governmental authority rather than personality and patronage. Military command will have to become responsible to civilian authority and rogue elements reintegrated into society or met with force.”<sup>38</sup>

The ICG report warns that “Unless there is a serious effort to tackle the drug problem across the region, lawlessness and corruption will continue to be endemic and the threat of a full-blown HIV / AIDS crisis will soon materialize.” The report suggests that “most of the aid to

the region has gone to boosting interdiction. Much more needs to be done in crop substitution and demand reduction.” It recommends that “Anti-drug efforts should be carried out as a key aspect of development and conflict prevention, not solely as a policing action.” This means that the causes of poverty leading to drug production and use should be addressed along with drug trafficking. The challenge will be to convince farmers that it is more beneficial for them in the long-term to grow legitimate crops when poppies have proven to be so profitable.

The ICG report suggests that in order for anti-drug efforts to be successful, “officials engaged in anti-drug trafficking should be provided with salaries that will lessen the likelihood of their selling out to drug gangs.” The report challenges European countries and European Union to “increase their contribution to combating the drug problem through well coordinated and effective programs that complement existing bilateral and international projects.”<sup>39</sup>

The IMF’s Director for Afghanistan, Adam Bennett, warned that Afghanistan’s opium poppies should be destroyed to keep the country from being run by powerful drug traffickers. “This is a very significant development in Afghanistan and it does carry great dangers for the stability of the country and of the economy.” He suggested that “eradicating poppy fields should go hand-in-hand with development of alternative livelihoods for farmers.”<sup>40</sup>

The National Drug Control Strategy<sup>41</sup> acknowledges the economic drain that opium production has on Afghanistan’s development, its contribution to political instability, and the financial assistance that drug profits provide to terrorist organizations. “For these reasons, the United States strongly supports multilateral efforts to reduce the illegal opium and heroin trade that is returning to Afghanistan.” The document points out that the United Kingdom is the lead nation for counter narcotics programs in Afghanistan.

The national strategy has two key elements: “disrupting the activities of the most significant drug traffickers through interdiction and law enforcement, and cutting opium production through alternative livelihood initiatives for farmers, coupled with comprehensive eradication efforts.”<sup>42</sup> This strategy for Afghanistan complements the overall National Drug Control Strategy of disrupting markets overseas and increasing the costs to the traffickers, making the enterprise less profitable. The US “will bolster the counter narcotics capabilities of the countries bordering Afghanistan to choke off the flow of drugs, precursor chemicals, and related supplies into and out of that nation. Afghan military and law enforcement personnel will be trained and equipped to perform the border and regional security functions that are vital to extending government control to areas without rule of law. Concurrently, near-term efforts will be started to eliminate drug-related corruption from the central and regional governments and the military. The United States will collaborate with the international community and

international aid organizations to create opportunities for legitimate economic livelihoods for Afghan farmers and laborers through initiatives that provide micro-credit alternatives and subsistence loans, legal crop substitution options, and cash-for-work programs for migrant workers. Where possible, programs will be focused on projects to redevelop the education, health, public safety, social services, telecommunications, and transportation infrastructure of Afghanistan.”<sup>43</sup>

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The United States government must use a multi-faceted approach to reconstruct Afghanistan. Social fabric and critical infrastructure must be built and rebuilt. The effort will take years, perhaps a generation, to repair the toll that a generation of civil wars and occupation have taken on the country. Controlling the illegal drug industry will have to be carefully coordinated with the rest of the overall plan. Many competing interests complicate the elimination of Afghanistan’s drug problem.

Maloney suggests that policy makers must determine the relationship between opium production and the existing power structures. Are the chieftains involved in growing poppies and producing and trafficking drugs in order to support their operations or is this their operation? “Like terrorism, drug production tends to gravitate toward and find a base in lawless regions. Having inflexible, overly moralistic policies for dealing with those who deal in drugs may be unrealistic in this environment if there are other priorities.”<sup>44</sup>

It is easy to argue that eliminating opium production and trafficking in Afghanistan is necessary to avert a source of income to al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations. It is also easy to argue that eliminating opium production and trafficking would improve the political and social conditions in Afghanistan. The challenge is to figure out how to move Afghans away from the drug industry and back to a legitimate source of income. Immediate and complete poppy eradication will not solve the problems, unfortunately, since the social and political upheaval could be more catastrophic than the current situation.

Large-scale opium production in Afghanistan is a relatively recent development, within the last generation. Afghanistan is now the focus of international attention, with the United States, the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization all pledging that “we must not fail in Afghanistan” lest it return to the difficult times it has suffered since the late 1970s. With so much attention on Afghanistan, this may be the time to try bold and imaginative strategies.

First, careful analysis needs to be carried out to trace the trail of money and determine exactly who is profiting from the drug trade—the regional chieftains and residents or the Taliban

and al-Qaeda. The United States has been successful in rooting out its organized crime problem through such analysis. Global movements of money, even from or within Afghanistan, should lead to similar success in Afghanistan.

Second, and perhaps the greatest challenge, will be to convince the chieftains to abandon the drug trade. This will be difficult because for some of them, power is the ultimate goal and producing and smuggling opium is a means to maintaining their position. The United States government may be able to use the relationships it created with the provincial leaders while forming the alliance to defeat the Taliban and al-Qaeda, to explain in unambiguous terms that if Afghanistan is to grow and thrive as a nation, it is in their best interest and the interest of their people that the marketing of drugs within Afghanistan's borders be abolished. The time to do this is now; there may not be a better time.

The role of the warlords in the future of Afghanistan must be handled carefully. According to Maloney, "a strong central government backed up by the Afghan National Army (ANA) ignores these power brokers. The chieftains are, in fact, the men who control Afghanistan. They must be part of the solution and made to feel that they are, since it was their people who ultimately bled to take down the Taliban and al-Qaeda alliance. The warlords may view an expansion of the International Security Assistance Force as a precursor force to outright imposition of ANA control, and therefore the central government control. This is a prescription for renewed civil war, something similar to the events of the post-Soviet, pre-Taliban period in the early 1990s, or worse."<sup>45</sup>

Third, farmers will have to be weaned from growing opium poppies. Numerous reports indicate that families are benefiting from their poppy harvest and able to afford things—new or larger homes, a car or weapon, or paying off debts—for the first time in a long time. Unfortunately, these short-term gains may keep them hostage to a hostile industry, and programs that break this dependency on growing illegal crops will benefit the farmers in the long-term. It will be extremely difficult to convince farmers, however, given human nature, that growing crops other than poppy is for their own good.

Repairing or improving the agricultural infrastructure—irrigation systems, storage facilities, transportation networks, markets, and production facilities—might shift the farmers back to growing the crops that used to grow in Afghanistan. The Afghan government already has an assistance program to entice farmers not to grow poppies. The program may be too successful perhaps, as many farmers and even some who are not farmers claim they were growing poppies but now have stopped growing the crop in order to receive the stipend. Better enforcement will help curb the abuse.

Education programs will provide young Afghans with alternative options to farming if there are other sources of income to attract them. In today's global economy, perhaps Afghanistan can become a source of labor for industries as China and India have become. This depends on a stable and secure country and Afghans educated enough to be trained in the skills required by industry.

All of this will depend on a strong Afghan government. It is too soon to tell what will develop after the national elections. Certainly, a relationship will need to be established between the central government and the regional chieftains. Economic and social assistance by the international community will need to continue. An international military presence to provide security is necessary until Afghanistan is able to provide its own. With a stronger Afghan government, more can be done to establish relationships with its neighbors, including cooperative regional projects such as increased trade of legitimate goods and services and better coordination to stop smuggling of all sorts, but especially drugs.

These measures will have to be applied carefully, and to ensure best success, they should be applied concurrently. Sequencing is important, since it will be impossible for some of the activity, like rebuilding infrastructure, before security is maintained. Can Afghanistan break its habit with opium? Yes, but not on its own. A concerted international effort will help it along the path to recovery.

WORD COUNT= 5,382

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Afghanistan After the Taliban*, (Philadelphia, PA: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 15 October 2001), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Robyn Dixon, "Opium Again Hooks Struggling Farmers," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 October 2003, sec. A, p. 5 [database on-line]; available from ProQuest; accessed 9 October 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Richard F. Nyrop and Donald M. Seekins, eds., *Afghanistan: A Country Study* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1986), 174.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 176.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 177.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 179.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 180 – 181.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 181.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan: A Short History of Its People and Politics*, (New York City, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 191.

<sup>11</sup> Barry McCaffrey, "Afghanistan's newest challenge; U.S. effort will fail unless link between terror, drugs overcome," *Armed Forces Journal*, January 2004, 10.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Sean M. Maloney, "Afghanistan: From Here to Eternity?" *Parameters* 34 (Spring 2004): 10.

<sup>15</sup> McCaffrey.

<sup>16</sup> Dixon.

<sup>17</sup> April Witt, "Poppies Proliferate; As Drug Trade Widens, Labs and Corruption Flourish," *The Washington Post*, 10 July 2003, sec. A, p. 1 [database on-line]; available from ProQuest; accessed 9 October 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Dixon.

<sup>19</sup> Witt.

<sup>20</sup> Owais Tohid, "Bumper year for Afghan poppies; Money from the opium trade may diminish US influence over the warlords, and aid Taliban," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 24 July 2003, 6 [database on-line]; available from ProQuest; accessed 9 October 2003.

<sup>21</sup> Ron Moreau and Sami Yousafzai, "A Deadly Habit; Afghan Warlords – most of them US allies – may be making a fortune off the country's drug trade," *Newsweek (International Edition)*, 14 July 2003, 28 [database on-line]; available from ProQuest; accessed 9 October 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Witt.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Dixon.

<sup>25</sup> Maloney.

<sup>26</sup> Rachel Ehrenfeld, *Funding Evil; How Terrorism is Financed—and How to Stop It* (Chicago, IL: Bonus Books, 2003), 52.

<sup>27</sup> "I.M.F. Says Afghan Opium Poppy Crops Should be Destroyed," *The New York Times*, 23 September 2003, sec. A, p. 5 [database on-line]; available from ProQuest; accessed 9 October 2003.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ewans, 192.

<sup>30</sup> Ehrenfeld.

<sup>31</sup> Ewans, 193.

<sup>32</sup> McCaffrey.

<sup>33</sup> Ehrenfeld, 53.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Tohid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> International Crisis Group, "Afghanistan and Central Asia: Priorities for Reconstruction and Development," *ICG Asia Report 26*, 27 November 2001, (Brussels, Belgium: International Crisis Group), i. The International Crisis Group is a private, multinational organization committed to strengthening the capability of the international community to anticipate, understand and act to prevent and contain conflict. ICG's international headquarters are at Brussels, with advocacy offices in Washington, D.C., New York and Paris.

<sup>38</sup> International Crisis Group, "The Afghan Transitional Administration: Prospects and Perils," *Afghanistan Briefing*, 30 July 2002, (Brussels, Belgium: International Crisis Group), 8.

<sup>39</sup> "Afghanistan and Central Asia: Priorities for Reconstruction and Development," 10.

<sup>40</sup> "I.M.F. Says Afghan Poppies Should be Destroyed," *The New York Times*.

<sup>41</sup> George W. Bush, *National Drug Control Strategy*, (Washington, D.C.: The White House, February 2003), 37.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 38 – 39.

<sup>44</sup> Maloney.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.





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